



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

DISCOVERER OF THE PACIFIC OCEAN

Four hundred years ago, on September 25, 1513, Vasco Nuñez de Balboa discovered the Pacific Ocean. As a young man he had wasted his patrimony at home, his debtors made life intolerable for him in Santo Domingo, to which he had retreated, and, concealed in a cask to avoid arrest, he sailed from Santo Domingo with Enciso in 1510 when the attempt was made to plant new Spanish colonies between Cartagena and Veragua on the Isthmus of Panama.

Vasco Nuñez is best known in the English speaking world simply as Balboa. He came to the front when this Spanish enterprise was overwhelmed by hopeless disaster. At that time he showed himself a leader of men, superseded Enciso in command, and, full of resource, energy and courage he did all he could to save the remnant of the expedition. The turning point of his life arrived with this opportunity to retrieve the misfortunes of his hapless compatriots scattered along the coast. The discovery of the Pacific was the crowning event of his career; and two years later, at the age of forty-three, he perished on the scaffold, a victim of the jealousy and treachery of unscrupulous men who had plotted against him at the court of Spain and had been placed in authority over him.

The new colonists along the coast were dying of fever and starvation when Balboa took the helm. He collected as many of the immigrants as possible at Darien on the Isthmus, planted crops, made friends of the native chiefs and was able before long to give attention to exploration and above all to the quest for gold. On one of his journeys into the interior he met the son of the Indian Cacique of Comogre, who presented some gold dust to the men under Balboa's command. They were quarreling over its disposition when the young man said to them:

"Why do you wrangle over so small a matter? If it is love of this metal that leads you to disturb the tranquillity of our country I can take you in six weeks along the border of another ocean where there is plenty of gold."

This was the first intimation that came to Europeans of the Western Sea. Gold was so plentiful near its coast, the young chief said, that the meanest utensils were made of it.

Balboa at once determined to find the new sea that led to the

land of gold. He returned to Darien to organize his expedition; but while zealously making his preparations, a vessel arrived from Spain with the news that Enciso, who had been deposed and sent back to the mother country, had gained the favor of the government and that Balboa had been condemned by the king and ordered to return to Spain.

In the hope to propitiate his sovereign by the achievement of some notable work, Balboa made all haste to fit out his party and on September 1, 1513, started with 190 Spaniards and many natives to find the new ocean. Francisco Pizarro was one of his officers. The object of search was only about sixty miles away, but to reach it dense forests had to be penetrated, steep mountains, deep rivers and morasses crossed, while unfriendly Indians increased the difficulties of the march. At last the party was rewarded for its privations by the sight of the great ocean. The young chief, who had told Balboa of its existence said that its surface was smooth, instead of ruffled like the Caribbean. From the summit of the range Quareca, where its waters were first seen in the distance, Pizarro and two others were sent forward to reconnoiter and one of them, Alonzo Martin, was the first European to launch a boat upon the new-found ocean. He pushed off from the shore in San Miguel Gulf. It was Magellan, who first crossed the ocean, that gave it the name Pacific.

Balboa reached the shore himself on September 29 and took formal possession of the "South Sea" (Mar del Sur) in the name of the king of Spain. He called it the South Sea because he traveled across the Isthmus from north to south to reach it. He remained on the coast for some weeks, gained further information about Peru, visited the archipelago of the Pearl Islands and then retraced his route to Darien. With the large booty he had collected, Balboa entered the town in triumph on January 18, 1514. He lost no time in dispatching a vessel to Spain with presents for the king and a full account of the discovery. Though he had disobeyed the king's command to return to Europe, his majesty was disposed to forgive him in view of his achievements. He named him the Admiral of the Pacific and appointed him Governor of Panama and Coyba; but scarcely had he conferred these honors upon Balboa than he inclined again to the appeals of the latter's enemies. An expedition was soon on its way under the command of Don Pedro Arras de Avila (now generally written Pedrarias Dávila) to supersede Balboa in the government of the Darien colony.

While all this was occurring Balboa crossed the Isthmus several times, took possession of the Pearl Islands, gathered materials for building two small brigantines, armed and launched them, and if it had not been for bad weather he might have reached the coast of Peru before the arrival of his successor in office. His plans for the conquest of Peru and the exploration of the western ocean were considerably advanced when he was summoned to Darien by the arrival of Pedrarias, who proclaimed that Balboa was a traitor to the king and had thrown off his allegiance. He arrested him at Acla, not far from Darien, thrust him into prison, had him tried for treason and compelled the judge to pronounce him guilty and to condemn him to death. The outrageous sentence was carried into execution in the public square of Acla in 1517.

From an unpromising beginning, Balboa had developed into a man of affairs, a brilliant shaper of events, an able colonial governor, and a far-seeing statesman, who probably would have rendered further service to his country if he had been permitted to live.

It was after his death that Pizarro, who had served under Balboa, carried the war into Peru that led to the downfall of the Inca empire.